

Atlantic Canada rediscovers golf as an attraction

By PETER BLAIS

After years of limited development, Canada's Atlantic Provinces — New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland — are beginning to attract the interest of major golf developers.

Geoffrey Cornish-designed New Ashburn (1969) in Halifax, N.S., and Bill Mitchell-designed Mactaquac (1970) outside Fredericton, N.B., were the last major Maritime projects to open in the three decades preceding the 1990s, according to Larry Brown, president of Fredericton, N.B.-based Atlantic Golf Construction Ltd. Atlantic Canada saw only the occasional renovation project and low-level push-up golf courses through the 1970s and 1980s, Brown said.

"The first modern course was Crowbush Cove on Prince Edward Island (PEI) which opened in 1994," said Brown of the Thomas McBroom design that Golf Digest named the Best New Course in Canada that year. "The PEI government had the foresight to do Crowbush against a fair amount of opposition. They've never made a lot of money off it. But a golf course generates a lot of ancillary revenue such as accommodations, gasoline and retail sales."

The government has traditionally been a major sponsor of golf in Eastern Canada. The federal government's Parks Canada has owned or operated Cape Breton Highlands in Nova Scotia, Fundy National in New Brunswick, Green Gables on PEI and the Golf Course at Terra Nova in Newfoundland.

Provincial governments have also been heavily involved. There are three provincial courses on PEI — Crowbush, Mill River and Brudenell; and two in Nova Scotia — Digby Pines and Northumberland Seashore Golf Links. New Brunswick's provincial government participated in the construction of several facilities, including Mactaquac and Campobello Island.

"Crowbush turned the corner and created a new demand for golf," Brown said. "It's the way it should be done. It's not an easy course to play. But it has been well accepted by the better golfers and has attracted people to the region."

Since Crowbush, developers have shown renewed interest in the region, Brown said.

McBroom-designed Bell Bay on Cape Breton Island was the next major project after Crowbush. It was built with government money, but is operated by the private sector. Rain slowed the project with the remnants of three hurricanes drenching the Atlantic coast in 1996. But it opened in 1997 and has been nominated for *Golf Digest's* Best New Course in Canada.

Cape Breton Highlands was renovated in the mid-1990s and was very well received. The Stanley Thompson design has traditionally been ranked among the country's top courses.

Newfoundland has had some projects, including Graham Cooke-designed tracks in Saint Johns and Cloevalley.



The new Bell Bay Golf Club in Baddeck, Nova Scotia, designed by Thomas McBroom, sports Atlantic Canada's largest practice area — and spectacular views with its 18 holes.

While high-end facilities like Crowbush, Cape Breton and Bell Bay received most of the attention, many moderately-priced courses undertook renovations to keep up with their more well-to-do neighbors. Localities and entrepreneurs also built inexpensive courses throughout the region. Having a relatively low population and little private investment capital, these lower-end courses are important to the region's beginning golfers.

In 1996, Cooke received a contract to design Osprey Ridge in Lunenburg, an hour west of Halifax, that Brown expects will be ranked among the top five in Atlantic Canada. "Modern courses in our region are characterized by a complete irrigation system (not necessarily double row) and bentgrass fairways. That [Lunenburg] will be one of three bentgrass courses in the region."

The future looks bright in the Maritimes. Cooke-designed Glen Arbour, the first real-estate golf community in Nova Scotia, is being developed by a group of Halifax businessmen.

A nine-hole Ward Northrup-designed track with housing running along most holes will open in Batherston, N.B., this summer and a Rees Jones design called Royal Oaks is scheduled to break ground in Moncton, N.B., this spring. Ron Gogan, a local drilling company owner, is among the developers of the Royal Oaks golf course community.

The province of New Brunswick hired McBroom to oversee a two-year renovation to the St. Andrews course at the Algonquin Resort, owned by the province and operated by Canadian Pacific railroads. The fact it is a Donald Ross design has caused some controversy. But the design has been modified so much over the years that little of the Ross flavor remains, Brown said.

Michael Hurdzan has been retained to design a second course at the existing Brudenell Resort in southeastern PEI. Construction is expected to start this year. Other less-expensive projects should also begin construction this year on PEI, Brown said.

But Nova Scotia is truly the hot spot along the North Atlantic coast. Cooke is designing Fox Harbour on Northumberland Strait. The high-end

course, a jet strip and housing should start construction this year and open by fall 1999. After a 12-year effort, businessman Jim Leahy hopes to start construction this spring on an 18-hole course named Arrowhead, located just north of Halifax. Heartland Park Golf Club, an 18-hole military course that is open to the public in southeastern

Dartmouth, will add nine seaside holes. Cooke is overseeing new green-site construction at existing Oak Hill Golf Club near Halifax. Avon Valley Golf Club 40 minutes from Halifax is midway through a renovation program overseen by Cooke. Inverness on Cape Breton, a former seaside mining site, is under consideration for a Cooke course.

Cooke is also designing an 18-hole track in Fredericton, N.B., called Kingswood Meadows that will likely begin construction in 1998 as part of a privately owned recreation complex.

A number of smaller, low-budget courses will begin construction or come on line this year throughout Atlantic Canada, Brown added. A typical nine-hole course with push-up greens can cost as little as \$150,000 Canadian.

"One of the most important things that has come along in the Fredericton market during the 30 years I've lived there," Brown said, "is an inexpensively built, nine-hole course called Gilridge. You can play it in an hour and a quarter and it costs just \$8. It's extremely busy. New golfers are not intimidated by

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Dale, Elliott named vice presidents at Golfplan

SANTAROSA, Calif. — Senior architects David Dale and Richard Elliott have been named vice presidents at Golfplan, the course design group founded here by Ronald Fream. In their new positions, Elliott and Dale are entitled to full voting rights at meetings of Golfplan's Board of Directors.

"I couldn't be happier to recognize David and Rick for their years of outstanding service to Golfplan," said Fream, whose firm has designed more than 150 golf courses in 52 countries. "With this move, they have more of a tangible stake in how we do business."

Dale joined Golfplan in 1988,

fresh out of Washington State University where he earned a BS in landscape architecture. "Ron had me on a plane to Asia within six months," said Dale, whose extensive course credits include the acclaimed Panya Park Golf Club near Bangkok, Guam International CC and Grand Shanghai G&CC. Dale is

also lead architect at Eagle Ridge GC, a hotly anticipated daily-fee design which should open for play south of San Francisco near Gilroy, Calif., next year.

"I'm excited about our focusing on the U.S. market, where we have several projects in the planning phase," said Dale, who will spearhead Golfplan's spectacular Sparrebosch project in Knysna, South Africa. "Our work abroad has earned a great deal

of attention for its quality. I'm confident our work in the U.S. will do the same."

Elliott earned a double major in landscape architecture and turfgrass management from the University of Maryland. After serving as head superintendent at Echo Mesa Golf Club, part of Sun City West, he worked with architect Cal Olson before joining Fream in 1988.

Since that time, Elliott has served as lead architect on several award-winning projects, including Golf de Fregate in St. Cyr sur Mer, France, and Golf de L'Isle Adam, named France's top new course for 1996. His spectacular design at Bali Pecatu Resort will open this year.

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members or anyone pushing them around the course. They play the game at their speed, learn the game and encourage their kids to play. It's the best thing to happen in the Fredericton golf market in a very long time. There's a place for those facilities as feeders for other courses. They develop players for the future."

Brown sees growth ahead for the Eastern Canadian market and continued government involvement, since tourism is so important to the area's economy. The golf fever that has gripped Southern Maine will eventually work its way up the coast into the Maritimes, he predicted. Land is available at favorable prices outside the three major metropolitan areas — Saint John, N.B., Halifax, and St. John's, Newfoundland.

"Land around those cities is very rocky, which has made it expensive to build there," he said. "But today, with modern highways, people don't seem to mind driving a bit. You can build something a half hour to an hour outside the city and people will travel there if you give them a good product."

The rocky ground and relatively low budgets are the major roadblocks to building in Atlantic Canada. The weather is another problem. "We used to have nice summers and springs. Now you don't know what the devil you are going to get. We had the wettest weather in 140 years in 1996. And after June 20 of 1997, we had the driest."

On the plus side, the area is populated with good workers, friendly people, spectacular scenery and a Canadian dollar that provides good value for U.S. tourists. After cutting funds in recent years, Brown said, the government is increasing spending for good park projects.

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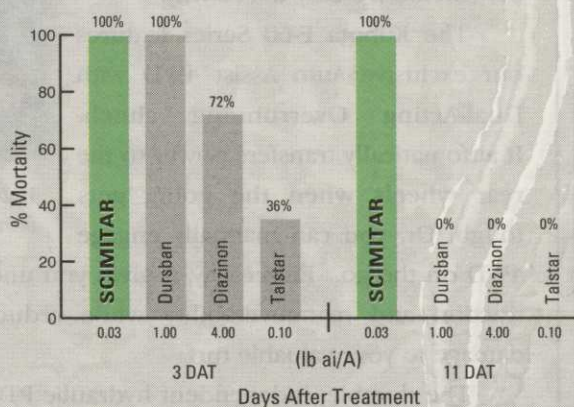
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